

REPORT OF THE YUKON RIVER SALMON NEGOTIATIONS

Representatives of the United States and Canada successfully ended sixteen years of negotiations on Yukon River salmon during the week of March 26, 2001. The negotiations took place in Whitehorse, Yukon Territory, Canada. The U.S. delegation was led by Mr. Stetson Tinkham and the Canadian delegation was led by Mr. Amos Donohue.

BACKGROUND

The 1985 Pacific Salmon Treaty was concluded without reaching agreement on the Yukon River Salmon Annex. Work towards agreement on Yukon issues continued on a separate track. Negotiators from the two sides concluded a 3-year "Interim Agreement" in 1995, in the hope of developing mutual trust and confidence. The Interim Agreement served as a purview of how the process would work if, and when, a final Agreement was reached regarding catch shares and management of Canadian origin chinook and chum salmon on both sides of the river. The Interim Agreement expired on March 31, 1998, with no resolution regarding catch shares of Canadian origin salmon. Subsequent negotiations and Government-to-Government meetings were unsuccessful as well.

DISCUSSION

Why were both sides able to conclude an Agreement now after sixteen years of negotiations? Advisors, managers and researchers are greatly concerned by the low numbers of fish returning to the Yukon River these past several years. The poor returns of chum and chinook salmon, (both U.S. and Canadian origin), played a significant role in increasing the awareness of the people along the Yukon that bilateral cooperation in management and research is the primary vehicle to help ensure the long-term sustainability of salmon. Disaster assistance has been provided to affected U.S. communities along the Yukon since 1998 to help mitigate the effects of these salmon shortfalls. An added incentive to reach agreement was the creation of the bilateral panel known as the Yukon River Salmon Panel (the "Panel") to administer a Restoration and Enhancement Fund (the "Fund"). The Fund is financed primarily by the U.S., in the amount of \$1,200,000, for restoration and enhancement projects on both sides of the river. The Panel shall make recommendations to the management entities concerning the conservation and coordinated management of salmon originating in the Yukon River in Canada. Ultimately, the Agreement is the work of the people that depend upon the salmon for cultural, sport, subsistence and commercial needs. There would have been no forward movement in the negotiations without the people's trust and confidence with current and proposed management measures and allocation schemes.

SUMMARY

The easy part is over. Now the work begins. The Agreement increases the Canadian harvest of chinook salmon from 18% to 26%, and increases the Canadian chum salmon from 20% to 26%. These “new fish” for Canada are reduced from the U.S. commercial catch. Management in the U.S. by both State and Federal managers must assure that the subsistence fishery is the primary consideration.

For more information, please contact Bill Hines, NMFS' International Policy Coordinator: (907) 586-7224 or William.Hines@noaa.gov.